

ABSTRACT OF THE DISCLOSURE

A system and method for multi-layer loading of food items such as frankfurters in a receptacle includes the steps of displacing groupings of frankfurters along a staging area , allowing the frankfurters to drop downwardly by gravity to an accumulation and storage area until at least two layers of frankfurters are accumulated and allowing the double layer of frankfurters to drop downwardly into a packing receptacle in a packing area. The method of the invention is accomplished by providing a lug chain with lugs spaced to group frankfurters in desired groupings on the staging area, a first set of displaceable supports positioned below the lug chain to allow a layer of frankfurters to fall downwardly by gravity to the accumulation and storage area, a second set of displaceable supports positioned in the accumulation and storage area to allow at least two layers of frankfurters to be accumulated, then actuated to allow the two layers to drop vertically downwardly to a collection receptacle in the packing area, and a pair of tucking flaps that are actuated to an open position to allow two layers of frankfurters to fall downwardly therebetween and to a closed position in which frankfurters are forced by contact therewith into appropriate alignment within the receptacle.